

IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE CHICAGO,  
BURLINGTON & QUINCY RAILROAD, NEAR WYOLA, MONT., ON JANUARY  
26, 1918.

February 20, 1918.

On January 26, 1918, there was a collision on the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad between runaway freight cars and a passenger train near Wyola, Mont., which resulted in the death of 4 passengers and the injury of 5 passengers. After investigation the Chief of the Bureau of Safety reports as follows:

The Sheridan division, on which this accident occurred, is a single-track line, over which trains are operated by time table, train orders, and a manual block system.

Eastbound freight train No. 50 consisted of 19 loaded cars and a caboose, hauled by locomotive No. 3116, and was in charge of Conductor Buchner and engineman Fuett. It left Billings, Mont., at 4:15 p. m., on January 25th, en route to Sheridan, Wyo., left Wyola at 12:05 a. m., January 26th, and stalled in a snowdrift on a 1-1/4% grade 1 mile west of Parkman, Mont., at 1:20 a. m. The crew then cut the train in two and the head end was taken to Parkman. The rear 10 cars and caboose, which were left standing on the hill, ran away and collided with passenger train No. 44 at a point about 4 miles west of Wyola while running at an estimated speed of about 50 miles per hour.

Eastbound passenger train No. 44 consisted of 1 mail car, 1 baggage car, 1 smoking car, 1 chair car, 2 Pullman sleeping cars, 1 cafe car and 1 baggage car, in the order named, hauled by locomotive No. 2923, and was in charge of Conductor Merritt and Engineman Knudson. This train left Billings, Mont., at 9:05 p. m., en route to Sheridan, Wyo., passed Lonia, 13.5 miles west of point of accident, at 12:15 a. m. and collided with the rear end of train No. 50 at about 2:05 a. m., after having come almost to a stop.

The locomotive of train No. 44 was considerably damaged, and the force of the collision drove the baggage car back about 50 feet, telescoping the smoking car immediately behind it to within about 12 feet of its rear end; the seats and passengers in the smoking car were pushed back into this space of 12 feet, all of the killed and injured being in this car. Both the baggage car and the smoking car were of wooden construction. The wreckage took fire, and the caboose and 5 cars were destroyed.

The rear portion of train No. 50 was left on a 1-1/4

per cent grade descending westward for a distance of two miles, and the remainder of the grade to point of collision varied from .5% to 1% descending. The distance from where the rear portion of train No. 50 was left standing to point of collision was 15.1 miles and the track consisted of several curves and tangents. The weather at the time was clear and cold.

Engineman Fuett of train No. 50 stated that his train stalled in a snow drift west of the west station board at Parkman, stood there about 14 minutes while the hand brakes were being set, then it was cut in two and the head end taken to Parkman. When the train stalled he made a light application of the air brakes, and later saw the conductor on top of the cars setting hand brakes with a brake club.

Conductor Buehner of train No. 50 stated that his train left Wyola at 12:05 a. m., and passed Aberdeen at 12:30 a. m. Approaching Parkman the train nearly stalled on account of the snow and the flagman was dropped off to flag. After proceeding about one-half mile further and when within a mile and a half of Parkman the train stalled in a snow drift. He took his brake club and set 7 or 8 brakes, but did not set the brakes on the caboose, cut off the rear 10 cars and the caboose, and the head end was taken to Parkman. He said he opened the angle cock on the first car of the rear end of the train and applied the air brakes in emergency and then closed it. He stated that he was delayed some time after the enginemen pushed back the slack on account of the air hose being frozen, and after the forward part of the train started he remained near the rear end until the head end had gone a car length or two and as the rear of the train did not move he felt positive that the hand brakes would hold the train without the air.

Rear Brakeman Powers of train No. 50 stated that when his train stalled he immediately walked back about 1/4 mile to flag. Shortly thereafter he looked back and saw the cars coming down the hill, ran toward them, got on the caboose and set its brakes, and tried to set the brakes on the other cars but found them already set and he could not set them any tighter on account of not having a brake club. He thought the speed of the cars was about 15 miles an hour when he got on them, and when he found he could not set the brakes any tighter he jumped off, the speed then being about 30 miles an hour.

Head Brakeman Hash of train No. 50 stated that when his train stalled he started back to cut the train in two but was directed by the engineman to remain with the head end so as to head the train in when it arrived at Parkman, which he

did. When he reached Parkman and after the head end was placed upon the house track the conductor told him to go back and get the remainder of the train, saying he would find 7 or 8 brakes set, but when he reached the point where the rear portion of the train had been left he found it had gone.

Enginemen Knudson of train No. 44 stated his train was moving about 20 miles an hour and pulling rather hard on account of the snow, and the first he saw of train No. 50 was its tail lights around the curve. He first thought he was overtaking that train and shut off steam, but when he saw that it was coming toward him at a high rate of speed he applied the air brakes in emergency, called to his fireman and jumped. He thought his train had come to a stop when the collision occurred.

This accident was caused by the rear section of train No. 50 being left on a 1-1/4% grade with an insufficient number of hand brakes set, for which Conductor Buehner is responsible. The testimony shows that of the 10 loaded cars and caboose left standing on the grade, the hand brakes on seven or eight cars were set, while the hand brakes were not set at all on the caboose. After setting the hand brakes Conductor Buehner made an application of the air brakes, which held the train until after he left it. It is probable that there was a considerable amount of snow and ice between the brake-shoes and the wheels, so that when the air leaked off there was not sufficient holding power in the hand brakes to prevent the cars running back down the hill.

Conductor Buehner was promoted to conductor in 1906 and had a good record. At the time of the accident he had been on duty 11 hours, after having been off duty 12 hours and 50 minutes. The crew of train No. 44 had been on duty about 6 hours and the crew of train No. 50 11 hours at the time of the accident.

J. C. F.